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DEPARTMENT FOR S/CT (SHORE) AND NCTC

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIA: 2008 COUNTRY REPORTS ON TERRORISM

REF: STATE 120019

¶1. Per reftel, Post is submitting the 2008 Country Report on Terrorism for Austria. Embassy POC for this report is Political Unit Chief Phil Kaplan, office phone: 43-1-31339-2114; email: kaplanpw@state.gov.

#### General Assessment

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¶2. According to Austria's Bureau for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism (BVT), there are some radical elements among second- and third-generation Muslim immigrants and among converts to Islam in the country.

¶3. An Austrian court in 2008 convicted a young Muslim couple for terrorist threats conveyed through the internet in late 2007. Sympathizers of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan were believed to have been behind arson attacks against the Turkish consulate in Salzburg and Turkish associations in Vienna and Graz in October 2008. In a separate incident the same month, Kurdish demonstrators unsuccessfully tried to force their way onto the UN premises in Vienna. A wanted PKK activist and Ocalan confidante, Ayfer Kaya, transited Austria in March 2008 and was subsequently arrested in Bavaria.

¶4. In November 2008, an Austrian couple kidnapped in February 2008 in Tunisia by a group calling itself "Al-Qa'ida in Islamic Maghreb" was released in Mali. The Austrian government denied rumors that it had paid ransom to the kidnappers.

¶5. Austria closely follows EU policies to fight terrorist financing.

The GOA actively participates in the EU Clearinghouse mechanism, which designates terrorist financiers under UNSCR 1373. During 2008, Austria fulfilled its obligations to freeze assets, pursuant to UNSC resolutions and EU Clearinghouse designations, but did not initiate any freezing actions independently. To implement the EU's Third Money Laundering Directive, Parliament in December 2007 approved amendments to the Stock Exchange Act, the Securities Supervision Act, the Insurance Act, the Business Code, and Austrian laws governing lawyers and notaries; in the first half of 2008 it also made amendments to the Gambling Act and the law governing accounting professionals. These introduced stricter regulations regarding customer identification procedures, including requiring customer identification for all transactions of more than 15,000 euros for customers without a permanent business relationship, as well as examining businesses suspected of money laundering, terrorist financing, and non-face-to-face transactions. The Business Code amendment requires all traders to establish the identity of customers for cash transactions of 15,000 euros or more.

¶6. In November 2008, the Vienna public prosecutor suspended criminal investigations against representatives of the Palestinian Association in Austria, an organization on OFAC's SDN (Specially Designated Nationals) list. The prosecutor stated that he was unable to establish proof of terrorism financing or membership in a

terrorist organization. In August 2008, a Vienna court ruled that the GOA should unfreeze about USD 8 million from a bank account belonging to the Abu Nidal terrorist group. The court determined there was insufficient evidence that the money was connected to terrorism or would be used to support terrorism. The ruling is under appeal.

#### Terrorist Groups

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¶17. The BVT singles out a handful of suspected extremist mosques in Vienna for monitoring. It continued to monitor the Egyptian Islamic Jihad movement, certain radicalized converts to Islam, and suspected Afghan extremists entering Austria as asylum seekers.

¶18. According to the BVT, there are a few immigrant Muslims who sympathize with groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Ikhwan al Muslimin), the Al-Gama'a al-islamiya, and the Global Revolution group (Hizb ut-tahrir al-islamiyya). Media sites monitored by the BVT include the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) and the as-Sahab Foundation for Islamic Media Publications. Of the 130,000 Turks in Austria, some 4,000 are believed to be sympathizers of the PKK. Some Turks in Austria support Turkish jihadist Metin Kaplan. There are also some sympathizers of the Iranian People's Mojahedin (Mojahedin-e-Khalq). Among Palestinians in Austria, there are supporters of Hamas, as well as of the Salafiyya Jihadiyya.

#### Foreign Government Cooperation

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¶19. Austria continued its participation in the Salzburg Forum, a regular meeting of interior ministers from Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Bulgaria.

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Stuart Baker, Assistant Secretary for Policy at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, participated in a Salzburg Forum meeting in Vienna in July 2008 and discussed visa policies with Austria and other participating nations.

¶10. The GOA in 2008 worked to implement the Pruem Treaty. Austria was one of the first EU countries to grant access to its police database to the six other EU countries that are party to the Treaty. The Treaty, which involves the exchange of DNA, fingerprint, and vehicle data, is designed in part to identify terrorism suspects.

¶11. Austria lags behind other EU members in implementing a 2007 EU directive obliging member states to store data from telephone conversations. The EU sees such storage policies (as of March 2009, storage of email and internet information will also be mandatory under this directive) as a tool in the fight against terrorism. According to a poll, 78 percent of Austrians reject the idea that data collection and public surveillance technology helps protect citizens from acts of terrorism. The European Commission in 2008 twice warned the GOA that if it failed to implement the data storage directive the Commission would take the issue to the European Court of Justice.

¶12. (U) The GOA in 2008 convened a number of international conferences under its Dialogue Between Cultures and Religions program. Government and religious leaders from around the world attended the conferences in Vienna. In December 2008, an international group of women activists founded Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE), an anti-terrorism organization headquartered in Vienna that seeks to develop a network of women who have been victims of terrorism.

GIRARD-DICARLO